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TESTIMONY BEFORE HOUSE COMMITTEES.

NO ONE has a right to demand as a matter of right that he shall be heard by a Committee of the House. The constitutional right of petition to Congress has nothing whatever to do with the claim to be heard in argument before a Committee. It is a matter of discretion with a Committee as to the mode in which it will seek information concerning subjects referred to its consideration.

The claim latterly made by the manufacturers, and those who profess to speak in their name, that they shall have "the right" to be heard, grows out of the general impression of those gentlemen that a tariff bill is largely private legislation for the benefit of the manufacturers, and that being so they have the right to represent their private interests before the Committee of Ways and Means.

The majority of the Committee believe that a tariff bill, like all other public legislation, should be based upon the interests of the public, while, of course, no harm, if it could be prevented, should be done to any private interest. As a matter of experience in former Congresses, these "hearings" were carefully prepared, and often disingenuous arguments, having the effect, whether intended so or not, to confuse and mislead, and so prepared as to conceal rather than to give information.

The gentlemen who proposed to appear were not to come as witnesses to be put upon oath and subject to cross-examination, nor did they propose to reveal to the Committee the cost of the particular article which the particular gentlemen manufactured, so that the Committee might ascertain from them what was the precise difference between the cost of the article manufactured in America and a similar article manufactured abroad. Nor did they propose to give to the Committee as a whole any information not obtainable by any member of the Committee in conversation with these gentlemen or others engaged in similar business; but solely to appear as organizations, associations or committees to present argu-

ments prepared for the purpose of influencing the Committee to legislate in their particular interest ; to bring pressure to bear upon the Committee by the appearance of the powerful organizations they represented, and to organize all the protected industries in one combined resistance against any legislation which would undertake to change the present excessive protection.

The mass of material accessible for the purpose of tariff legislation was, in the judgment of the majority, sufficient to render these "hearings" unnecessary. In addition to the testimony taken before the Tariff Commission and the hearings taken before the Ways and Means Committees of the Forty-eighth and Forty-ninth Congresses, and the very full statistical reports of the various bureaux of the Government, printed arguments in the shape of pamphlets, circulars and letters by persons interested in every industry affected by any possible change in the tariff, were sent to each member of the Committee, and possibly to all the members of the House. Therefore every member of the Committee had abundant means to inform himself as to the facts necessary to reach an intelligent conclusion concerning the matters that were under discussion.

The Committee also felt that the granting of permission to hear any one argument from those representing any one industry was a pledge on its part to hear all other industries, or all other persons professing to represent them, and it was not willing to grant such permission, in view of the possible delay which would occur.

The Committee also knew that any bill it reported would have to undergo discussion in the Committee of the Whole under the five-minute rule ; that there was no factory or interest that did not have on the floor some member of Congress who felt that natural and just interest in its development that would render him certain to make himself familiar with the facts concerning the question, and thus submit those facts to the consideration of the House upon his responsibility as a representative.

C. P. BRECKENRIDGE.